



"Nobody owes us a living"

"The crux of our problem as I see it, is how are we to increase our respective national incomes, and while so doing how are we to win the race against the increase in population... Our first task is to help ourselves. We must as far as possible, by our own efforts, develop our economies to secure the maximum benefits for our people from our own resources and by our own efforts..."

*President J.R. Jayewardene of Sri Lanka,
at an UNCTAD meeting in 1967.*

The themes of self-reliance and national resilience run steadily through the pronouncements of many Asian leaders as they approach the prospects, processes, and problems of development. "Nobody owes us a living," a phrase first uttered as a national admonition by Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew of Singapore, has become something of a slogan in Asia, where the need to look inwards for the strength that sustains a people as they move towards well-being is often emphasized. As Finance Minister Ronnie de Mel of Sri Lanka put it recently: "As much as a beggar will not advance in private life, a nation that begs will also not develop... Only a nation which relies on its own efforts will succeed in the long run."

There is no *mantram* or magic incantation that enables a nation to reach the goal of self-reliance. Development requires a blend of strategies, techniques, and resources. There is no such thing as the "correct" blend; each country has to make its own. Discovering, unleashing, and fostering a nation's creative energies is a process that lies within the aims of the International Development Research Centre.

Asia, a region reasonably well-endowed with human resources, has a long-established tradition of learning and scientific inquiry. Thirty years ago, for example, J.R. Jayewardene, now President of Sri Lanka, then his country's Finance Minister, told an audience of modern scientists that "the whole process of the scientific method, where knowledge gained through the senses is verified by exact observation, corresponds to the Buddhist term *gnana*." China's Confucian system of education enforced a three-tiered system of study and examination, not dissimilar to arrangements introduced later in West Europe. Physicians in Asia used *ekaveriya* (*rauwolfia serpentina*) to treat hypertension many, many years before the drug became a part of modern pharmacology. Technology, the

handmaiden of science, was not unknown in ancient Asia, either. Irrigation tanks, phased cropping, terraced cultivation on hillsides, drainage systems, and ornate temples — now, alas, not much more than attractions for fat-walleted tourists — betoken considerable expertise in such areas as agriculture, hydrology, geology, and construction engineering, long before the colonial era began.

Against such a background, it is not surprising that Asian institutions have responded energetically to the IDRC's offer of support for development research. The Centre has been described as "a granting agency channeling its main support to research workers in developing countries, to encourage and assist them to undertake investigations, and find solutions, to their own problems." Thus, the IDRC does not play the role of a *mahadanamutta* — an expert in omniscience — enforcing solutions on others, but responds to project proposals from developing countries, formulated in terms of their own priorities. So Asian researchers and research institutions must take as much credit as the IDRC for the fact that in the first six years of its operation the Centre spent 39 percent of its project funds in Asia. Some of the work supported by the IDRC in Asia is described in a series of articles in the rest of this Dossier.

The IDRC Reports first published a special Dossier in Vol.6 No.1, one year ago, when it focussed on population. Succeeding Dossiers have all been on specific development topics, and the Asia Dossier is the first that deals with a geographical region. Dossiers on other regions will be published in coming months.

The present Dossier, and others that follow, will show how new partners in development — developing country researchers and the IDRC — can help developing countries to help themselves.